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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: CORREA REPLACES DEFENSE MINISTER WITH CLOSE AIDE

REF: QUITO 327

Classified By: Ambassador Linda Jewell for Reasons 1.4 (b&d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The GOE announced Minister of Defense (MOD) Wellington Sandoval's resignation April 9, after accusations by President Correa of U.S. infiltration of Ecuador's intelligence agencies. Javier Ponce Cevallos, the Personal Secretary to the President, was sworn in as MOD in the same

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day; his background is as a journalist and writer on social and development issues. Responding to the President's threats of changes in the military, the Ministry of Defense issued a formal request from the Armed Forces commanders for a meeting with the President and a statement defending its cooperation with the USG as legitimate. In addition, Commander General of the National Police (ENP) Angel Bolivar CISNEROS Galarza will be replaced by ENP Inspector General Jaime Hurtado. (End Summary)

MOD FORCED TO RESIGN

¶2. (C) After numerous assertions by Wellington Sandoval that he would not step down as Minister of Defense, the latest on April 8, his resignation was announced the next morning. A series of events undermined his tenure as MOD. Following the March 1 Colombian attack, Sandoval had to explain why the Ecuadorian military did not have prior knowledge of or capability to detect the Colombian incursion. Most damaging, however, was the failure of the Ecuadorian military to inform President Correa that Franklin Aisalla, an Ecuadorian victim of the March 1 attack, had ties to the FARC. Correa accused the GOE's intelligence services, and specifically the military intelligence service, of infiltration by the CIA and of passing information to Colombia, saying that there would be repercussions (ref A). A civil-military seminar entitled "Strategic Challenges and Opportunities," sponsored by the USG and held in Quito April 7-10 with Ecuadorian military participants, was played in the press on April 8 as further unwanted intervention by the USG, although attended by the Vice-Minister of Defense (who retains his position) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

¶3. (SBU) In response to the press coverage and the President's accusations, the Commander of the Joint Staff, Lieutenant General Hector Camacho, and the commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force on April 8 formally and publicly requested a meeting with the President "to maintain an open and transparent dialogue on this issue to avoid putting the security and stability of the nation at risk." The Ministry of Defense issued a statement on April 8 that the Ecuadorian

military's cooperation "with other countries and national and foreign institutions on issues of security, defense and development are permanent and legitimate." This statement also defends the USG seminar as "within the processes of training and cooperation established with various countries, and in this case with the U.S. Embassy."

¶4. (SBU) Principal Under Secretary of Defense Miguel Carvajal announced on April 9 that the President's Personal Secretary, Javier PONCE Cevallos, would replace Wellington

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Sandoval and be sworn in the same day. Carvajal said in an interview that Sandoval's departure was not due to pressures within the Armed Forces, but rather concern over weaknesses in the system of intelligence of both the military and police. He implied further changes at various levels, "to include improved operations and efficiency, and better conditions to control what is happening along our border, as well as a change in the concept of intelligence systems ... for the handling of any risk or threat."

¶5. (SBU) At his swearing-in ceremony, Ponce said he did not have any cards under his sleeves, rather the desire to make the relationship between the military institution and civil society transparent. He also asserted that he would lead the creation of a "high level commission to investigate the supposed flight of information from the military to organizations of other countries of the region."

¶6. (C) Carvajal, who reportedly has close ties to the President's inner circle, is expected to stay in his position. Less certain is the fate of many others within the MOD and Armed Forces, especially those who have maintained good working relations with the USG. The Chief of the Joint Command General Hector Camacho, as well as Army Commander General Guillermo Vasconez, announced on April 9 that their positions were at the disposition of the President. Vasconez stated that "the Armed Forces are united, but I feel as head of the Army, that the institution has been questioned, that there is no confidence in who is running the institution, and because of this I've offered my position to the disposition of the President."

POLICE COMMANDER ALSO OUT

¶7. (SBU) The Commander General of the Ecuadorian National Police (ENP), Angel Bolivar CISNEROS Galarza, also stepped down on April 9 as part of Correa's shakedown of those responsible for failures in the GOE's intelligence services. Following the announcement of his resignation, Cisneros stated that the ENP had informed the President in writing about the ENP's intelligence on Aisalla, and that he was preparing a document that detailed all the agreements on training and cooperation that the ENP maintains with the USG and other countries. Cisneros' replacement will be General Jaime Quilino HURTADO Vaca, currently serving as the Inspector General of the ENP. The Embassy has had little contact with Hurtado.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) We expect our military and police partners to be cautious about cooperation with the USG in the short term. It remains to be seen what impact these events will have on our longer term military and counternarcotics cooperation, which has been strong to date with the Correa administration.

BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

¶9. (SBU) Javier PONCE Cevallos, who has served as the President's Personal Secretary since August 14, 2007, was tasked with coordinating the activities of the President's office with all cabinet ministers. Ponce is a native of Quito, born on April 28, 1948, and has worked mostly as a journalist and writer. He started his career as a journalist covering the Constituent Assembly of 1966, and has closely followed social and rural development issues and the

indigenous movement. Ponce was an editorialist for El Universo from 2001 to 2007 and Hoy from 1989-2001, and authored 15 books, including novels, poetry and political commentary. Ponce studied sociology and political science at the Central University of Ecuador in 1968-1970 and sociology at the University of Vincennes, France in 1970-1972.

Jewell